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THE EFFECT OF THE WAR ON ENGLISH LIFE AND THOUGHT¹

By Hon. J. Howard Whitehouse, Member of Parliament

I have a somewhat difficult task tonight, because I want to attempt to give you some sort of a picture of conditions in a belligerent country, which are necessarily always changing. And let me say at the beginning that I do not desire to speak tonight from any party standpoint. I am not here tonight to plead any cause, and, if it be not too presumptuous for me to say so, I simply wish to attempt to give you a record of facts in the spirit of a contemporary historian, without passion or prejudice, so far as a person coming from a belligerent country can claim to speak without prejudice and without passion.

At the outbreak of the war, the English army consisted of some thousands of men. It now consists of some millions. The withdrawal of men from civil life to the army was one of the factors that led immediately to a great change in England. It led to a great reorganization of the industrial, commercial and social life of England. Many people may be, at first, disposed to think that the changes that are taking place in England (and I am sure the same would be true of the other belligerent countries) are temporary changes, and that at the end of the war many of them will cease to have effect. I am one of those who believe that the changes are largely permanent changes, and I want to put before you some facts and considerations to support that view which I hold very strongly. You are looking at the war in Europe at a great distance, and you see the drama of it. What you do not see at this distance, and what many of us do not see who are in the middle of the passion and excitement of the war at home, is the mighty permanent revolution it means in the methods and

¹An address delivered at Clark University, November 13, 1916.

the thoughts and the organization of the belligerent countries.

Now, take first this question of the change that has been caused in England by the withdrawal of millions of men from the ordinary civil life of the nation to go into the army. I want to remind you what a profound influence that has had in the organization of the country and upon some of the great domestic problems that troubled us before the war. Let me remind you that before the war we had what was known in England (I don't know whether you had the same problem in America) as the Women's Question. We were face to face with a very extensive demand for the political enfranchisement of women. It was reported to me, on a former occasion, when I had been dealing with this Women's Question in England, that I had dealt with the question so impartially as to convey the impression that I was, myself, opposed to women's suffrage. Let me, therefore, say, if I may depart from my rôle of historian for a moment, that that was an erroneous impression. Before the war, the supporters of women's suffrage were divided, in England, into two classes: there were those who desired to obtain the vote for women in a constitutional way, to persuade sufficient members of Parliament to vote for it in Parliament and to persuade the government of the day to make it a government measure and to carry it through all its stages as a government bill. That was a long and tedious process—in fact, it appeared to some that it would reach a solution in the Greek Kalends! So there gradually grew another school of supporters of women's suffrage, who believed in what I may term "brisker" methods. Before the war, those brisker methods were being indulged in very freely. One of the last recollections I have of a public meeting held before the war, in England, was a public meeting held in an academic city that shall be nameless, and I went to that meeting in company with a cabinet minister. We were driving in a car to the meeting, and before we had reached the place where the meeting was to be held, the glass in the car was broken and we were covered with bricks and

stones and hard and soft vegetables. Let me hasten to say that all those attentions were for my distinguished friend; I was simply the unfortunate victim of his popularity. I mention this circumstance, as it was typical of many similar meetings and will illustrate to you the passion that was caused by this question. Indeed, buildings were burned down, and public meetings were broken up constantly, and members of Parliament and members of the government were often prevented from speaking. Let me also say, before going on to follow the changes in this connection due to the war, that those to whatever party they belonged, who desired the political enfranchisement of women, did not want the vote as an end in itself. The question was complicated by a great many questions, and there were many supporters of the suffrage who desired the vote as a means to an end, and who desired to deal with other great social problems which affected women. They wished to secure the economic and social equality of women before the law. So it was much more than the simple question of giving women the vote. It was related to other very serious and very controversial social questions.

Now, what happened when the war broke out? I have spoken of the great withdrawal of men from civil life into the army. That immediately caused a great demand for labor. The demand became greater and greater, as more men were taken into the army, and the result was that the women took the place of the men in the industrial life of the nation. I do not know whether many of you know England well, or knew it well before the war, but if you did, and should visit it now, and cared to look for these things, you would be able to see for yourselves how great a transformation has been effected in this respect. Women now are doing a large part of the work of the nation which, before the war, was done by men. They are not only doing work suited to them, but they are doing other work which is not so obviously suited to them. I do not mean that the work is above their intellectual capacity; I only meant that physically the work is, perhaps, unsuited to them. You will find women in the railroad stations, sell-

ing tickets; there are women conductors on the trains, and women conductors on the trams. You would find women drivers of commercial vehicles. Women have taken the place of men in the shops and offices, and in business establishments, which before the war were staffed by men. If, however, you went outside these ordinary occupations of the big towns and visited the agricultural districts of England, you would find that agriculture was being largely carried on with the help of women; and if you went into the innumerable munition factories which are everywhere active, you would find women side by side with men, doing work of the most laborious nature and doing it successfully, and in other heavy manufacturing industries you would also find women doing the heavy physical work that before the war we associated with men.

What does this mean? It means that the women of Great Britain almost in a day achieved economic independence.

Now, many think that at the end of the war we shall go back to the state of things existing before the war. I think that is a shallow and mistaken view. I do not share it at all, because I believe that the women, having won economic independence, are not in the future going to sink back into an economic dependence such as marked the condition of so many of them before the war. I think their advent into the industrial life of the nation is permanent, and I think their competition with the labor of men is not only permanent, but will be conducted on terms of equality, and I think you will see a growth of great trade unions devoted to the interests of women, just as we have seen the growth of the unions devoted to the interests of men. I think this also will have a profound influence upon many of those problems associated in the past with the claims that women have made for political enfranchisement.

Now, before I develop the permanence of that change further, let me say this: I have often been asked whether the very fact that women have taken this part in the work of the nation during the war will not almost automatically, or quite automatically, solve the problem of the suf-

frage, the great national controversy that we had conducted with so much passion. Will not that great controversy be settled automatically, after the war, and will not other domestic questions also find a similarly satisfactory settlement after the war? I wish I could believe so. I wish I could believe that war had this extraordinary effect, that it brought people of opposing views on such questions as this to think alike and to agree upon a common cause of action, but I do not think that is the result of war, or has been the result of war in any age or country. I do not think that we shall all be of the same mind after the war, or that we shall all be content to give women the vote as a kind of reward for their good conduct during the war. It is very interesting, I think, to inquire whether the national mind has changed in this respect and would give up beliefs that were so strongly held before the war. I think, if you can take a sufficiently detached view, even in war time, and in a belligerent country, there is evidence to be gathered as to whether or not men change their views on questions like this. Let me give you one example. There is being held at the present time, in England, what is known as a National Mission of Repentance and Hope. Now, I do not mention that National Mission of Repentance and Hope to consider it from a religious or theological standpoint: far from it. I only mention it in order to take from it certain evidence bearing upon the point I am trying to illustrate. This National Mission was organized by the archbishops and bishops of the Anglican Church, in England. When they met to consider the details of this mission, they were conscious of the claim of women in the past to equality with men and of their claim to equality in social service and opportunity. Before the war, there was always a party in the English Church which desired the church to give recognition to the Women's Question from a progressive standpoint, and so the bishops decided, during the war, in connection with this mission of the English Church, to give a certain new recognition of the standing of women; they decided, for the first time in the history of the English Church, that women should be allowed to take a certain

part in public. It was not a very great part. They were not to be allowed to speak from the pulpits or the reading desks of the churches. They were not to be allowed to stand in the chancel, or on the steps, or to stand anywhere where they would be raised above the level of their audience; but so long as they did not stand on a higher level than their congregation, and so long as the congregation consisted exclusively of women and children, but did not contain any men, they would be allowed to speak in public at the meetings of the mission. That did not strike some of us as a very revolutionary proposal—at least, some of us thought that it was an experiment that could be carried out without any considerable danger to the state! It may have been a considerable advance from the standpoint of bishops, but it really did not mark a very considerable advance from the standpoint of some of the people, at least, in the country. But, moderate as it was, closely guarded as it was with these conditions, the proposal brought at once a great outburst of opposition from members of other schools of thought within the Anglican Church, and the bishops were at once taken to task—sometimes, I thought, in language of almost frank brutality. The bishops were told they were destroying the fabric of our church life, and that they were acting contrary to the teaching of the scriptures. So great was the opposition that the bishops themselves saw at once how revolutionary they had become. I am bound to say, however, that they were frightened at the outburst that their scheme had aroused, and they frankly withdrew the proposal that they had made concerning the part that women were to play in the mission. They announced that in view of the fact that it was regarded as a revolutionary proposal, they must withdraw the permission they had given, and they could allow the women to take no part in the mission in the way of speaking, no matter what position they occupied in the church, and no matter what the character of the congregation; they much regretted to do so, but they must withdraw all their proposals! That sounds very amusing to us, and I think it is, too, and I mention it, in passing, to show you

that human nature does not automatically change because it is war time, and I am driven to the conclusion that personal prejudices and beliefs are not things that are going to be given up and that these great domestic problems that were matters of acute controversy before the war will again become matters of controversy after the war. But while that is true, we shall be very shortsighted if we do not realize that the change which has taken place in the position of the women of the nation is, of course, a factor which must affect the thought of the nation on this question after the war. Certainly it will affect the power of women, after the war, to achieve the franchise. Women will be in a much stronger position—a much stronger economic position, and a much stronger position in every way to maintain the claims that they had put forward before the war, and, though I do not see the automatic solution of the difficulties in question, yet I think that the strength of those who support the enfranchisement of women will be very much greater after the war.

Now take another aspect, if you will, of the social changes in English life. The scarcity of labor, due to the enormous increase in the army, has only partially been met by the services of women, and that means that a part of the necessary labor is supplied by the youth of the nation and, in some degree, by the children of the nation. Before the war, many of us were looking forward to a great advance in English education. Many of us thought that the social organization of the country took an undue toll of the youthful life. We have, in England, an elementary school system for the children of the poor, which is unlike your American system, because we have not the common school in the sense in which you have the common public school attended by all children, practically, without reference to their social class. We have an elementary school system which is, in the main, attended by the children of the poor, and which is not scientifically related to further forms of education. We have no public high school to which children of the elementary schools go automatically—a free public high school. Before the war, many of us were con-

scious of the extraordinary waste of the best assets of the nation, due to the fact that our boys left the elementary school at the age of thirteen or fourteen, in order to undertake at that immature age the work of life. There was always a great demand for boy labor in England. The boy was always greatly sought after, and we were looking to an extension of the school age and adequate provision for intermediate education to bring some of this economic and social wastage to an end. The war, of course, stopped all these plans; not only that, but in war time all the educational influences of the country are necessarily weakened. As the demand for labor grew acute, boys not only left the elementary school at the statutory working age (thirteen or fourteen), but in thousands of cases were allowed to leave school while still under statutory obligation to attend school. They went into agriculture, and sometimes into other forms of industry. I remember that in the autumn of 1914, the withdrawal of children of school age from school for work in agriculture or other employment was thought to be only temporary, and people hoped that in a few months they would return to school, but, alas, this was not to be.

It may interest you, in this connection, to estimate the demand for child labor by comparing the different values, before the war and during the war, of an English boy. Before the war, a boy who left school, in England, at the age of thirteen or fourteen, if he lived outside of London, in the provinces of England, could secure employment, but his value would be five shillings a week—one dollar and twenty-five cents a week. If, however, he lived in London, his value would be higher, owing to the higher cost of living in London, compared with the provinces, and there he would be worth about two dollars a week. Compare those pre-war rates of pay for the English boy with the rates that prevail today, wholly in consequence of the demand for labor. The boy of fourteen leaving school today is eagerly sought after, and would get four, five, or six dollars, or even more in works where boy labor is most urgently required. The result is that not only the English woman, but the English boy has become economically inde-

pendent. That economic independence of the English boy is a much more serious and a much more complicated matter than would appear at first sight. I want to ask you to notice certain things in connection with the economic independence of the English boy. I want you to consider the new influences that surround the English boy as a result of the war. One, of course, of the great tragedies of the war—the greatest tragedy of all war—is the loss of wealth. I do not mean material wealth, but the loss of wealth that can never be replaced. The great tragedy of all war is the loss of the best assets that a nation has—the loss of its youthful life. In the English army as in all the armies the casualty lists are heavy, and every day some hundreds of English boys lose their fathers, and the greatest influence in the ordinary life of a boy is forever withdrawn. But in thousands of cases where the boy has not lost his father forever, his father is at the war, and that influence is for the time being removed from him. That means that the whole family life is changed; the whole of the natural influences surrounding the child in normal times are changed.

That is not the only vital change. Losing, at the most impressionable time of his life, a great part of the home influence, the educational influences upon the boy are relaxed. He himself is urgently wanted in industry and agriculture, and therefore he probably leaves school much earlier than he would have done in days of peace, and with all these higher influences removed, the home influence weakened and changed, the school influence withdrawn altogether, he yet becomes economically independent, which means that he is also independent of all restraint, and he is prematurely getting a man's wages and a man's freedom. I do not need to tell you how serious that problem is. There are some evils caused by war that can be rectified after the war, many hardships that can be put right, many burdens that can be removed. Here is an evil due to the war that if you do not attend to it now, it can never be attended to in the future. This is one of these things that you cannot leave until the end of the war in order to put it right. The

result of this weakening of the influences upon youthful life is already shown in England by the increase in juvenile offenses, an increase so remarkable that the government has taken action on the matter, and only a few days ago, the Home Secretary, on behalf of the government, convened a conference of people who were interested in the problem, who were associated with organizations connected with their welfare, in order to take counsel as to what was to be done with this evil and how to mitigate it, and proposals are still under consideration.

A part of the problem was connected with what we, in England, call the cinema—the American expression is I believe the “movies.” I believe the cinema in England is an institution we owe to your own great inventiveness. We received it, I believe, in all its perfection, from this country. The cinema, in England (I can not say how far it reflects American conditions in this respect), has become an extraordinary social influence. It is to be found not only in the big cities, but in every small village. I represent, for instance, what is called, in England, a county constituency, which consists of a considerable number of small towns, and especially a considerable number of tiny villages, for the most part built by the coal mine owners, and many of them are miserable affairs. It was thought that the coal pits might not last forever—indeed, it was thought that they might not last very many years. The proprietors of the pits, therefore, did not spend an undue amount in the architectural adornment of the cottages of the miners, nor, indeed, in the internal arrangements. In the villages which I represent and which I know well, and the hospitality of which I have often enjoyed, many of the houses which are occupied by respectable, hard-working people, industrious and thoughtful men and women, consist of only one room. They look very wretched and forlorn places. Well, however, degraded these villages are from the housing standpoint, however poverty-stricken they are, however lacking in all the ordinary evidences of civilization, I can always be sure of finding two social institutions in these villages; I can always be sure of find-

ing a public house, and I can always be sure of finding a cinema imported from America. There is no village so poor as not to do them reverence; and they have a considerable influence upon the imagination of the people. Before the war this was a problem, but during the war it has become a very acute problem, and perhaps it may interest you, in order that you may realize what kind of a social institution the cinema has become in the lives of the children and how eagerly it is sought after by them to know that some of the proprietors of these cinemas, in towns that I know personally, do not charge an ordinary coin for admission, so far as children are concerned. Instead of paying a coin, they present a bottle and that is accepted in payment instead of a coin. The reason for this is that the proprietors of the cinema can get a large attendance of children if they allow them to come in on payment of the bottle and they can sell the bottles afterward to the manufacturers who require certain kinds of bottles, and it is perfectly easy for the children, in most cases, to beg or borrow a bottle, or obtain one by other means. The result of this, especially during the war, is that magistrates and judges all over the country are tracing the crimes (I use the word "crimes," for they would be so if committed by adults) with which juveniles are charged directly to the influence of the cinemas. The English boy has a dramatic sense—a strong dramatic sense, and I am very glad of it. When he sees these sensational crimes portrayed in these moving pictures, he seems to be filled with a desire to reconstitute these events in his own life. The influence of the cinema has become much more important during the war, because there are not the same influences around the boy, restraining him and guiding him. What I have said about the cinema is only one detail of the subject. The fundamental difficulty is due to the change in the national life, to the change in the home influence, to the weakening of the educational influences, to the use of the boy in industry, and to the fact that he becomes economically independent at so early an age.

Let us take another aspect of the changes in the na-

tion. In the earlier stages of the war, in England the army was made up by voluntary enlistment. I am not going to enter into a discussion of the principles of voluntary enlistment or the principles of conscription, but I want you to remember that the voluntary system of enlistment in England meant (roughly speaking, and subject to many reservations) that those people entered the army whose circumstances permitted them to enter it, who were free to enter it, and things naturally arranged themselves. When, after the first eighteen months of the war, conscription was introduced, there was necessarily a change in the family life, because in so many cases the husband, and sometimes the husband and his sons, are at the war, and the mother of the family may be engaged in some form of industrial work or some form of war work. Now, while that has meant an extraordinary change in the family life of the nation, in the social organization of the nation, it has meant, curiously enough, a great prosperity in the civil part of the nation—a great industrial prosperity. One of the most amazing features of England during the war time, is the fact that, if you went there now as a stranger, you would think that never before had the nation been so prosperous. There is a demand for labor everywhere. Every one is fully employed. Old men, women, young people are getting wages far higher than the wages they could ever obtain before the war. The wife of the soldier, of whom there are millions, receives a separation allowance for her absent husband, and receives, also, an allowance for each of her young children. In addition to this allowance, she may be able to go to work and earn high wages, and perhaps her children, or some of them, may be able to go out and earn high wages, and the result is that many women belonging to the working classes are far wealthier during the war than before the war. The results are seen in all sorts of ways, because when people become suddenly much better off they do not automatically receive the necessary wisdom and prudence in the spending of their new wealth. It is very interesting to observe the directions in which there has been a revival of industry in Eng-

land in the manufacture of things not wanted for the war, but wanted because of the new wealth of sections of the working classes. For instance, I am very well acquainted with a certain city in England known as Birmingham. It is not particularly beautiful, and it is in the center of the Black Country. One of the industries of Birmingham is the manufacture of very cheap jewelry and other goods, much of which, I think has been exported to America and other countries. Before the war, the industry of Birmingham, so far as cheap jewelry was concerned, was rather declining; and the makers of cheap Birmingham jewelry were falling upon evil days. Since the war broke out, there has been a revival in their business, because so many working women have desired to purchase this jewelry out of their large earnings. It has been a feature for women to take little babies into jewelers' shops and insist upon buying a gold ring for the baby's finger in honor of her father at the war. The jewelers have not usually had rings sufficiently small, and have been compelled to pad the ring to keep it on the finger. That is one illustration of the kind of expenditure which is taking place in consequence of the war. Then, again, there is a great revival in the demand for musical instruments. There has been a great revival in the demand for pianos. A piano has not been bought because there was a demand for it from any one who could play. It has been bought, in some cases, by women who could not play it, even when no one in the household could play it, but it was supposed to be a desirable and respectable form of investment, and so the piano has been bought out of the large earnings during the war time. It is of no use when bought, but it is felt to be the proper thing to buy. These instances are instructive to us as showing not only how great is the prosperity owing to the high wages, but showing that the wages are spent, sometimes in a way that does not show wisdom or prudence. There is no reason to be surprised at that, for what takes place is a perfectly natural thing and precisely what one would expect all the world over.

I have given you these indications of the changes in

English life, which are forced upon the nation by the facts of the war. There are other changes that are not so easy to describe—the more subtle changes; changes in thought; changes in the way people look at religion; new views that people have of fundamental problems; and I should be acting unfairly if I represented to you that in England we were all of one mind, even during the war, on these questions. The war has not yet caused us to see all things alike. There is every phase of difference of opinion between us, and those differences especially develop when we attempt to think of the problems of the future, of the settlement of the national life after the war, and of international problems after the war. Of course, war time is not a time when a democracy flourishes. You cannot expect to find, in war time, the free expression of a democratic people—at least, if you expect it, you do not find it. War does not work out like that; but although public opinion may not be encouraged, may even be suppressed, as it always is in every belligerent country during war, it yet exists. It is being made. It is undergoing profound changes; and one day it will find full expression. Let me give you one example. The governments of all the belligerent allied countries have met together, through their representatives, to consider their national policies after the war from the standpoint of the trade of each nation, and the program has been drawn up which is known as the Economic Pact of Paris. That policy foreshadows a change, so far as England is concerned, in her system of free trade. Therefore, you might easily be deceived into thinking that England had decided to give up free trade at the end of the war. I do not think that is true. I think you would find that before any departure from free trade was agreed to by the English nation, there would be a long controversy indeed, and I am doubtful if free trade would be departed from. I would remind you that the great majority of the English nation before the war was in favour of her historic policy of free trade, and there has been no automatic surrender of those beliefs during the war, as will be shown, I think, at the end of the war; and this question is especially interesting

and important because it leads on to what I want to say in conclusion—the relation of the national problems in England to international problems.

This question of free trade for England, while I suppose it is first a national question, is also an international question, because there are many of us who believe that if, at the settlement, we should, in order to punish our present enemies, build up a tariff wall against the rest of the world, it would tend to sever us not only from our present enemies, but also from the great neutral nations of the world, and there is in England, a great body of progressive and enlightened opinion, which still holds to the faith that it expressed before the war; that faith I must describe as the international faith. That great body of opinion has recently been given expression to by Lord Bryce, a man who, I am sure, is known and trusted in America. Lord Bryce has reminded my countrymen that the settlement of this war must not be founded upon the desire for revenge, or upon passion and hatred. He has reminded my countrymen that the problem before us as a nation at the end of the war is how to make this the last war, how to build up not only the national life, but the international life, and how to remove forever the scourge of war from the menace of mankind; and I entirely agree, if I may say so, that that is the problem which will be before us at the end of the war. We shall have failed if, in the settlement that we hope to bring about, we should only perpetuate this present war. Let me add this with regard to the attitude of America. I desire to say this because, during the short time that I have been in America, I have so often been asked whether it is not true that throughout England there are feelings of intense anger, disappointment, and irritation at the attitude of the United States of America. The question is so frequently asked me that I reluctantly believe that the belief must be generally held in America. I want to say, quite candidly, that I believe that view to be quite untrue, quite lacking in any substantial basis. It is true that we have, in England, in the days of war as in the days of peace, a sensational section of the press.

That was its character in the days of peace, and it has not altered its character in the days of war. It is a great minority of the press, and it does not represent any section of the British public. Throughout the British nation, there is, I sincerely believe, a feeling of the deepest respect and affection for the American nation. There is, I believe, the desire to grow closer and closer in their relationship with the American people. It is an ideal that I hope will one day be achieved, that the English-speaking people will come closer together; and when I say that, I am not thinking of an alliance offensive to other nations; I am simply speaking of the English and American nations using their great inheritance in order to secure the peace of the world. I remember with gratitude that during the war the one great constructive suggestion made in any country for the help of the belligerent world has been in America—the proposal of the league of nations to secure the peace of the world. I do not inquire whether that in itself is adequate, and I do not say it is not open to many criticisms, but I do say that it has the great value of being a constructive proposal, that it knows the end it seeks to achieve, and it makes at least tentative suggestions to secure that end. I say that America, by giving such constructive proposals, is doing a great service to the world, and that what the whole world now wants is the wisdom of America, the thought of America, expressed in the form of constructive suggestion. I believe, if I may say so with great humility, that there is before the American nation today an opportunity that comes not once in the history of a nation, but only once, perhaps, in the history of a world. It is no less than the opportunity that America has, from her position of unmistakable moral power and from her position of detachment from the war now raging, to give the belligerent world the fruits of her own wisdom, not only to help the belligerent world, it may be, to peace in this struggle, but to help the whole world, belligerent and neutral alike, so to organize the international life, so to set up final courts of arbitration, so to assist in the change of outlook in the nations of the world, as to make war forever

impossible and secure the international brotherhood of the world, and help forward the dawn of that day,—I wish that we could feel that we saw it today above the hill tops of time,—when men shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks and learn war no more.